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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 001393

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SUBJECT: AFM HE YAFEI TELLS LT. GENERAL EIKENBERRY CHINA
CONCERNED UNITED STATES COULD ATTACK IRAN

REF: IIR 6814 735 07

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David S. Sedney.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

11. (S) China is increasingly concerned that the United States could attack Iran, Assistant Foreign Minister He Yafei told Lt. General Karl Eikenberry, outgoing Commanding General of the Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan, during a February 27 meeting (other subjects discussed reported separately per reftel). AFM He said China has been paying close attention to recent statements on Iran by senior United States Government officials. Lt. General Eikenberry responded that these statements clearly outline the American position. AFM He said the United States-China relationship is too important to be sidetracked by Iran. Current deployments of United States' military assets to the Persian Gulf and recent United States' diplomatic exchanges with Middle Eastern countries remind Beijing of similar deployments and exchanges in advance of United States' military action in Iraq. Iran's religious leadership may see itself as "backed into a corner" and might unleash worldwide terror attacks. Conflict between the United States and Iran would be a disaster for the world economy, AFM He said. End Summary.

Beijing Concerned United States Could Attack Iran

12. (S) China is increasingly concerned that the United States could attack Iran, Assistant Foreign Minister He Yafei told Lt. General Karl Eikenberry, outgoing Commanding General of the Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan, during a February 27 meeting. AFM He said China has been paying close attention to recent statements on Iran by senior United States Government officials. General Eikenberry responded that these statements clearly outline the American position. AFM He said the United States-China relationship is too important to be sidetracked by Iran. The United States and China should continue to build mutual strategic trust to make the bilateral relationship the "cornerstone" of the international order. The world is faced with many multilateral issues that neither China nor the United States can solve alone, AFM He said. Beijing is also concerned

about Israel's reaction to Iran's continued refusal to halt its nuclear program. Lt. General Eikenberry responded that the Israelis share the same concerns as the rest of the international community.

13. (S) AFM He stated that Beijing is worried that Tehran's refusal to negotiate, combined with what might be perceived as Washington's preparations for war, will defeat any attempts, before they are tried, at finding a diplomatic solution. Current deployments of United States' military assets to the Persian Gulf and recent United States' diplomatic exchanges with Middle Eastern countries remind Beijing of similar deployments and exchanges in advance of United States' military action in Iraq. Iran openly discounts the effectiveness of a United States' missile campaign against its nuclear facilities, AFM He said.

14. (S) Lt. General Eikenberry asked AFM He what China sees as the potential sources of leverage the international community has over Iran. AFM He stated some sanctions will be necessary to create pressure on Iran. Pointing out that Iran's religious leaders are the final decision makers, He said that MFA Iran experts are worried that Iran's religious leadership may see itself as "backed into a corner." Noting that Iran's leaders in the past have compromised at the last moment, AFM He stated that it is hard to know the true intentions of Iran's leadership. It is quite possible that they might unleash worldwide terror attacks. Conflict between the United States and Iran would be a disaster for the world economy, AFM He said.

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15. (U) Lt. General Eikenberry has cleared this message.
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